



U.S. Department of Justice

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September 8, 2005

EVENT: Guilty Plea

Defendant: Michail Aronov

**Chicago Area Man Pleads Guilty to Conspiracies to Commit Forced Labor,
Immigration, and Money Laundering Crimes in Connection with the
Compelled Servitude of Exotic Dancers in the Metro Detroit Area**

Stephen J. Murphy, United States Attorney, Eastern District of Michigan, and Bradley J. Schlozman, Acting Assistant Attorney General, Civil Rights Division, announced that Michail Aronov, age 33, a Lithuanian citizen residing in the Chicago, IL area, has pleaded guilty to charges that he conspired with others to compel Eastern Europeans to serve as exotic dancers in the metropolitan Detroit area through forced labor, trafficking, document servitude and obstruction, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 1589, 1590, 1592, and 1519. Aronov also pled guilty to engaging in an immigration conspiracy involving the women, which included the illegal recruitment, transportation, and harboring of the women, in violation of 8 U.S.C. §§ 1324(a)(1)(A)(ii), (iii), and (iv). Finally, Aronov pled guilty to conspiring to launder the proceeds of the compelled servitude and immigration crimes, in violation of 18 U.S.C. §§ 1956 and 1957. Aronov pled guilty before United States District Judge Victoria A. Roberts on Thursday, September 8, 2005. Aronov was arrested in February 2005 when two Ukrainian women escaped from their servitude and sought help from federal agents.

According to a factual stipulation attached to the plea agreement and other court records, Mr. Aronov admitted today that he and his business partners operated a business enterprise from 2001 through 2005 called "Beauty Search, Inc.", premised on importing, brokering, and managing Eastern European women who served as dancers at exotic dance clubs in the Southeast Michigan area, where they held the women in a condition of compelled service, collecting their earnings. Aronov admitted that he and his partners employed a number of coercive methods to compel and maintain the continued service of the dancers, including: confiscating the women's passports and other legal documents to increase the women's legal vulnerabilities and to prevent or delay their escape; imposing debts as large as \$25,000 per women, which the women had to repay over time through earnings from exotic dancing; maintaining the women's social and linguistic isolation; imposing "rules" designed to isolate the women from outsiders who might encourage or facilitate their escape; enforcing compliance with various real and arbitrary rules through interrogations, monetary penalties, physical violence and threats of physical violence (including brandishing a Baretta 9 millimeter semi-automatic handgun); periodically searching the women's apartments, while they were at work, for photographs evidencing prohibited social contacts or money that should have been turned over to Beauty Search, Inc.; relating stories of previous mistreatment of women, both real and imagined, in order to instill fear in the women; and threatening to turn the women into the authorities, who would purportedly jail and deport them because of their illegal immigrant status.

"Holding another human being in involuntary servitude is morally reprehensible," said Bradley J. Schlozman, Acting Assistant Attorney General for the Civil Rights Division. "Today's guilty plea sends a clear message that victims can safely place their trust in federal law enforcement because we will swiftly investigate and vigorously prosecute those who would attempt to profit at the expense of another's freedom."

"We have no tolerance for modern-day human slavery," said U.S. Attorney Stephen J. Murphy. "We will never ease our federal effort to find and prosecute those who use force and threats to hold people in bondage. We will bring the full force of federal law to stamp out these pernicious acts."

Brian Moskowitz, Special Agent in Charge, U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Detroit, Michigan, stated, "Today's guilty plea stands as an example to all those who would deceive people to come to the United States, and then force them into slavery for profit. Our ICE special agents are committed to working with our law enforcement partners to

identify, investigate and prosecute human traffickers. Such people have no regard for human life." Moskowitz heads the ICE Detroit Office of Investigations, which includes the states of Michigan and Ohio.

FBI Special Agent in Charge Daniel Roberts stated that, "The FBI working with it's law enforcement partners will continue to aggressively investigate cases against those who victimize persons by forcing them into slavery for profit and violating their civil rights."

Aronov remains in custody pending his sentencing. He was referred to the United States Probation Department for a presentence investigation. Aronov faces a statutory maximum sentence of up to thirty years in prison or a fine of \$750,000, or both. The parties further agreed that the Court may enter an order of restitution and a forfeiture money judgment against Aronov of at least \$537,043. Aronov has agreed to cooperate in the government's continuing investigation and prosecution of others, and could receive a sentence reduction if his cooperation is deemed to be substantial assistance under the federal Sentencing Guidelines.

The case is being investigated by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Internal Revenue Service, Criminal Investigation, and the State Department Diplomatic Security Service. Assistant United States Attorney Mark Chutkow and Lou de Baca, Senior Litigation Counsel at the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Criminal Section, are prosecuting the case.

The Justice Department has made human trafficking a significant priority. Since 2001, the Justice Department has prosecuted 269 traffickers -- a three-fold increase in cases filed over the previous four years. As of August 2005, the Justice Department had 206 open trafficking investigations.